From: Dave McClintock
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/2/02 9:27am
Subject: Microsoft's anti-competitive behavior

I work for a public school district in Delaware. Recently, the high school librarian sent me an e-mail asking me why she could no longer access Microsoft's Web site for Encarta (encarta.msn.com), an online information resource similar to an encyclopedia. When I checked this out, I found that I could use Internet Explorer to bring up the Web site just fine. But when I used Netscape Navigator, I received the following error message:

Microsoft VBScript runtime error '800a000d'
Type mismatch: '[string: ""]'
/intl/bver.inc, line 8

Microsoft has "fixed" this Web site to make it appear that Netscape does not have the capability needed for displaying this Web page. This Web page has a Visual Basic script embedded. Internet Explorer "understands" Visual Basic, but Netscape does not, hence the error. Visual Basic is a proprietary Microsoft technology, not an Internet standard. Microsoft could have just as easily used a Java script (whcih is an open Internet standard), but chose not to do so in order to make non-Microsoft browsers inoperable on this site.

The Web is a wonderful educational resource for our public school students. These resources should be constructed so that a variety of technologies will work properly. Our public libraries used to work on this principle - one didn't need special glasses, or technology, to read World Book Encyclopedia as opposed to other encylopedias. A student who opened World Book could just as easily (and in a very similar manner) get information from any encyclopedia written by different publishers.

Microsoft's use of Visual Basic scripts on their Web sites is just another example of their monopolistic behavior. Quality of content in Encarta should be the benchmark for how they compete with other resource sites, not proprietary technology (especially when open technology standards already exist). If Encarta has better content, then people will use it instead of other online resources which have less quality of content. But the only way they can use it now is to access it via Internet Explorer.

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